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Dear Readers,

The diversity of the issues addressed by the articles in this Open Issue of Mountain Research and Development proves that researchers and practitioners around the world have been working on all the key concerns underlined in the 3 paragraphs constituting the “Mountains” section of the final outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), entitled The Future We Want, annexed to the General Assembly’s Resolution 66/288 (United Nations 2012). The first of these 3 paragraphs points out mountains’ crucial role in providing water resources; their particular vulnerability to adverse impacts of climate change, deforestation and forest degradation, land use change, land degradation, and natural disasters; and the problem of retreating glaciers. This paragraph on environmental concerns is followed by one on social issues: mountains are recognized as “home to communities, including indigenous peoples and local communities, that have developed sustainable uses of mountain resources”; it mentions that these communities are often marginalized and emphasizes the need to address poverty, food security and nutrition, social exclusion, and environmental degradation in these areas, inviting states to “strengthen cooperative action with effective involvement and sharing of experience of all relevant stakeholders.” The third paragraph calls for “greater efforts towards conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity” and encourages states to “adopt a long-term vision and holistic approaches, including by incorporating mountain-specific policies into national sustainable development strategies, which could include, inter alia, poverty reduction plans and programmes for mountain areas.” The section on Mountains concludes with a call for international support for sustainable mountain development in developing countries. Incidentally, both editors-in-chief of MRD and the IMS Executive Director attended Rio+20 and its side events and are committed to the outcome document.

The first paper in the MountainDevelopment section, by Fiona Proscovia Mutekanga and co-authors, takes up the issue of inclusive cooperative action recommended in the Rio+20 document: it proposes stakeholder analysis as a means to assess and strengthen efforts to enhance cooperation with, and involvement of, local stakeholders in an integrated water management program in Uganda. In the second paper, Muruganadam Muthiah et al analyze endeavors to improve existing extension measures in the livestock sector aiming to address mountain-specific challenges in Uttarakhand, India; they underline the need for increased access to knowledge based on a better understanding of local people’s perceptions of livestock health in marginal areas.

The Rio+20 outcome document emphasizes that maintaining mountain ecosystems is essential for sustainable development in mountains and beyond mountains. Papers in this issue’s MountainResearch section contribute to increasing understanding of mountains as fragile ecosystems and of the drivers that threaten them. Ashwini Kulkarni and co-authors address the fact that it is very difficult to make overall projections regarding climate change—recognized as a major factor of global-scale change—in the Hindu Kush–Himalayas; they present new projections simulated by the PRECIS regional climate model and validated by the dataset recently developed by the APHRODITE project.

The next 3 papers in the MountainResearch section examine human factors leading to change. Alessandro Paletto et al point out that forest management strategies developed in the past in the Italian Alps must change because people’s needs have changed; their paper analyzes social perceptions and preferences in a valley where there is a need for adapting forest management policies. Social perceptions are indeed a relevant factor in a country like Italy, where local people’s decision-making has a strong influence on forestry policies. Concerned by shrub encroachment that menaces pastureland in Bhutan, Kesang Wangchuk and co-authors present the results of an experimental design to test whether controlled burning is an effective method to restore meadows as a key ecosystem; based on their positive findings they propose a schedule for implementing this measure. Finally, Jin-tun Zhang and colleagues examine vegetation patterns and species diversity in the Baihua Mountain Reserve—an ecological barrier against dust storms from the western areas and a key recreational area in the highly populated Beijing city area.

In the MountainPlatform section, the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) presents its new strategic orientation for the next 5 years. In brief, ICIMOD aims to focus on producing high-quality research and increasing the impact of this research on sustainable mountain development. This will certainly increase its effectiveness and contribute to the Future we Want.

We hope you will find this issue useful for your work on mountains and mountain communities.

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